

# Committee on Resources

## Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

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### Witness Statement

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August 17, 1999

My name is Diana Enright, I am a board member of the Glacier Country Regional Tourism Commission, which is a non-profit organization, dedicated to a balanced partnership among eight western Montana counties ( Flathead, Glacier, Lake, Lincoln, Mineral, Missoula, Ravalli, and Sanders). We market the region to visitors and inform the public on the value of tourism. Glacier Country is one of the six regions in Montana promoting tourism. Tourism represents approximately \$446 million to Glacier Country.

As residents of Montana, we benefit from so much natural splendor, beauty and outdoor adventure. Our state, and in particular, Glacier Country, is an easy sell with the tourism industry. From the snow-capped mountains, to a lake lined with fall colors, people know Montana is a place they will visit time and time again. Our local communities benefit financially whether those visitors are casting their first fishing line, floating their first white water rapid, walking through an art gallery, or staying here in a historic lodge. Glacier National Park is a major anchor and focus for northwest Montana. It represents a significant economic impact to all 8 counties, but in particular, Flathead, Lake, Lincoln and Glacier counties, which border the park.

Today people travel to enrich their lives, to delve into history, and to escape the noise of technology by surrounding themselves with the beauty of nature. This is reinforced when you look at why people visit Montana. The top five reasons are 1) Glacier National Park; 2) Yellowstone National Park; 3) the mountains; 4) fishing; and 5) Montana history. One of our strategies is to market the significance of the corridor between Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks, which we call "geysers to glaciers" or "glaciers to geysers" depending on which direction you are heading.

The two national parks are similar to the anchor stores of a huge shopping mall. The "small stores" in between are the communities, which depend on those anchor stores to bring in the customers. If one of those major stores, in this case, Glacier National Park, has an facet in disrepair, such as the hotels, it will affect how many visitors can be accommodated, and in turn, alter the economy of the entire area.

Structural restoration and improvements could mean the hotels stay open longer, translating to a substantial economic gain for the communities in Glacier Country. We could market the area to more meetings and conventions, as well as high-end tour groups during the shoulder seasons. Spring and fall are when we need the business and it's also the time when groups tend to meet, as well as travel.

The high-end tour groups used to come to this area, but now they don't, saying the Park doesn't offer the accommodations their clients want. After viewing the beauty of the area all day, they want to retire to a facility that is truly first class. They are not looking for rustic, but for a safe, comfortable, historic experience.

Montana's heritage tourism is "a destination with a story," it is travel directed toward experiencing the arts,

heritage, and ways of life unique to Montana's people and places. Glacier National Park and its hotels are part of this hospitality heritage, but unless the hotels are renovated will anyone want to experience what we have to offer? Part of that heritage also includes the Lewis and Clark expedition. The Lewis and Clark Bicentennial may draw visitors to certain parts of Montana, but they will also be searching for other historic offerings. What better place to experience history than Glacier National Park and its National Historic Landmark buildings. These structures were once a showcase for those people who came by stagecoach and should be again for those who come by automobile.

Cultural tourism makes a significant contribution to economic and community development. It involves and benefits local residents, cultural institutions, and the travel and tourism industry. It is also a means of preserving our nation's cultural heritage. The historic lodges of Glacier National Park are priceless aspects of Montana's heritage.

Communities throughout the United States have developed successful programs linking history and tourism. Cultural organizations such as museums, symphony orchestras, and historic preservation groups have formed partnerships with tour operators, state and regional travel offices, as well as the various chambers of commerce to market an area. If the hotels of Glacier National Park were renovated, imagine what an economic impact it would have year-round, rather than just seasonally.

The impact tourism makes on the Montana economy is much broader than many think. The Institute for Travel and Tourism Research, at the University of Montana, reported that in 1998, 26% of the tourism money spent went to food; 24% to local businesses through retail sales; 17% to lodging. 22% went to gas, and 11% went to other purchases and transportation. Charts representing what that means to all of Glacier Country and the counties are included. You can see how Glacier National Park impacts Glacier, Lake, and Flathead Counties the most. Glacier County's accommodation taxes represent the lodges in the Park, mainly in the months of late June, July, August, and September. (exhibit)

The historic lodges of Glacier National Park should be one of the gems in the crown of the continent. They are currently tarnished and in need of repair to bring out the shine they once possessed. That "shine" represents jobs, history, tourism, culture and preservation of something precious to this part of Montana, and the United States.

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